

**NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES  
BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA  
May 30, 2012**

**PI- 12-07**

**TO:** Directors, County Social Services  
Regional Supervisors  
Division of Juvenile Services  
Tribal Social Services

**FROM:** Dean Sturn, Administrator, Foster Care Program

**SUBJECT:** Reporting Sentinel Events and Critical Incidents

**PROGRAMS:** Foster Care Services-Manual Chapter 624-05

**RETENTION:** Until Manualized

In a continuing effort to ensure the safety and well-being of foster children, the following policy is a clarification on the reporting of sentinel events and critical incidents as they relate to foster care.

“Sentinel Event” is defined as:

“Any unexpected occurrence involving death or serious physical or psychological injury or risk thereof that is not related to the natural course of the individual’s illness or underlying condition. Serious injury specifically includes inappropriate sexual contact.” The phrase “or risk thereof” includes any process variation for which a recurrence would carry a significant chance of a serious adverse outcome. They signal the need for immediate investigation and response.

There are basically two levels of reporting that are required:

- 1) Incident Reports: Complete SFN 50508 and submit to Risk Management as per local Human Service Center Policy. (This can be done on-line.)
  
- 2) Sentinel Event Reports: Complete SFN 50508 and submit to Risk Management **AND** immediately notify Executive Director (Carol Olson), Disaster Preparedness Administrator (Russ Korzeniewski), DHS Risk Manager (Julie

Leer), HSC Director, HSC Risk Manager and Institution Superintendent (if applicable) by telephone, e-mail or voice mail.

An occurrence, which requires the filing of an incident report within the Human Service Center, does not automatically mean it is a sentinel event. An incident becomes a sentinel event when there is:

- 1) Death
- 2) Serious injury (including inappropriate sexual contact)

If you're not sure if something needs an incident report, please ask the regional supervisor or simply err on the side of caution and fill out an incident report.

If you're uncertain whether something is a sentinel event, consultation is available from the regional supervisor or CFS to help determine if the situation is a sentinel event. A sentinel event will always require an incident report, but every incident reported is NOT a sentinel event.

Generally speaking, a foster youth who runs away is a **reportable incident**, but is **not a sentinel event**.

Generally speaking, a foster youth who is seriously injured (including inappropriate sexual contact) or who attempts suicide is a **reportable incident** and is a **sentinel event**.

If there are questions regarding this policy, please feel free to contact the foster care administrator.